IS ENGLAND ON THE VERGE OF REVOLUTION?

Cause of Anxiety Found in Widespread Strikes, Idle Laborers, Paralyzed Industries and Public Discontent

Otto H. Kahn, Though, Believes England Will Settle Her Present Difficulties as She Has Those in the Past

Though Whitelaw Reid, the American Ambassador to England, has denied the accuracy of a recent report of an interview in which he was quoted as making a comparison between the conditions in England brought about by the present coal strike and the conditions that preceded the French Revolution, the opinion attributed to him is one which a great many people in England and out of it have lately been pondering over. The present coal strike comes as a climax to a long series of troubles, domestic and foreign, and lately cumulative. It was only last summer that the country faced a crisis in economic conditions almost approaching in severity that which at present confronts it. The efforts of the Government to make peace between masters and men, as they put it over there, have so far not been fruitful. At present Mr. Asquith's Ministry is in the position of trying to force the mine owners to yield to the strikers.

Consideration of the various social and political movements which have gradually put the British Government in the position of truckling to the trade unions has led many people to the conclusion that England is face to face with one of the gravest crises in her history. They point out that the industries of the whole nation lie almost paralyzed, that millions of contented operatives have been forced to stop work in branches of industry which depend upon coal for their sustenance, that the traffic of the country's railways is held up, that pacific measures seem to be capable of affording only temporary relief, and that officers of labor unions sign agreements only to have them repudiated by the men over whom they have been supposed to exercise authority.

"I have been trying to recall," runs the statement attributed to Ambassador Reid, "conditions in Paris as described just previous to the overthrow of the Government, and as far as I can remember a similar state of apathy existed there. I think there is no doubt that conditions here are grave, and they are being made worse by intertwining the industrial and political situations."

Even if Ambassador Reid was not the author of the opinion quoted many thinking men familiar with the situation over there believe that much evidence might be cited in support of the justness of the comparison. Such men ask: "Is England on the verge of a revolution?" In a recent letter to the London *Times*, discussing the situation caused by the coal strike, H. G. Wells wrote:

"This struggle, I submit, is amazingly discreditable to the English gover ning class. It is a worse disillusionment than the South African war. Here are men on the one hand, clear, informed, exact; here are the owners and the Gov ernment on the other, windy and vague, and standing on their dignity.

"The people we trust to govern us seem to have been taken by surprise, after a full half year's warning, to be inadequately informed and planless. They didn't know; they didn't even know they ought to know. I sit over my dwindling fire full of the apprehension of discomforts to come, and it is not against the miners that my resentment gathers. It is against the traditions and shams of party politics, against the organization of ignorance by the public schools, against the systematic exploitation of Parliament by lawyers that leaves us now with nothing but shifty politicians in a crisis that calls in vain for knowledge and statecraft."

Mr. Wells's testimony is borne out by Upton Sinclair, who after a personal investigation over there found the situation "pregnant with revolutionary meaning."

The Boer war was the first rude shock to the average Briton's self-esteem in almost a century. Ever since the War of 1812, the arms of England had been successful on land and on sea. Toward the closing part of the Victorian era things were going on smoothly at home, and the Englishman was convinced that his country was invincible, and that its institutions had nothing to fear from time or man. Yet during that period his country was being slowly forced out of its commercial supremacy.

The class of men who had for centuries been the backbone of the country, the yeomen, had been steadily diminishing. This country and Canada tempted some; others found South Africa profitable. The nation gave itself up to sport, and the score of a cricket or a football match became of more importance than the increasing difficulty of raising grain to sell in competition with the great supplies that were flowing across the Atlantic. Young men forsook the land, from which it was getting more and more difficult to win a competence, and flocked to the factories and to the cities. The landlords, when they could afford it, held on to their great estates. Men who had gained great wealth in trade bought up the small farms and turned them into grouse moors and shootings.

Then came the war in South Africa, which cost thousands of lives and brought home the lesson that not only was England's military power not up to the mark, but that there was something radically wrong with her young men. They had not stamina. General Sir Robert Baden-Powell was one of the first to recognize this and to preach training for the generation coming on that would make it strong and self-reliant.

Some called the late King of England "Edward the Peacemaker," and there is no question of his having been the greatest force for peace England has had in recent times. He soothed France, he calmed his warlike nephew of Germany. His personal popularity was of great effect in ironing out certain difficulties that arose at home. But he could not cope with the industrial warfare which soon began to threaten England from the outside.

The Germans had begun, under the encouragement of Emperor William II., to manufacture other things than toys, and works of art in such profusion that they had to look for outside markets. They came into competition with England in foreign countries, and eventually shops in Oxford street and the Haymarket began to offer knives and razors and tools, just like the English made, but cheaper. The result was to reawaken the anti-German feeling. Manufacturers, and through them a portion of the public, began to demand that such articles should bear the inscription "Made in Germany," so that the public would realize that though cheaper the German razor, for example, was not as good as the honest British razor. Some manufacturers stamped their product, "Made in Great Britain" so that people would know they were buying the real thing.

But it was not only Germany that was engaged in the industrial warfare. The United States had for some years been engaged in turning out labor saving devices and conveniences and exporting them. In the first few years of the century these were exploited in Great Britain on a large scale. Pneumatic tools, typewriters and safety razors, with a hundred other things protected by patents taken out in Great Britain, were sold over there without paying any duty. American shoes were exported in large numbers, and many of these things could not be approached, in some respects—the shoes for combined cheapness and good looks, for instance—by the British article.

It was then that the rise of the tariff party took place. Singers were hired to work on the patriotic feelings of the masses by singing in the music halls exhortations to buy articles of home manufacture. One of these songs ran:

> Buy, buy, buy at the John Bull Store!
> The Deutscher and the Yank we'll need no more;
> And the money that we gain shall in British hands remain,
> If we buy at the John Bull Store.

Joseph Chamberlain was the forefront of the high tariff movement. It seemed to collapse after the Government, to stop the clamor against the free importation of German and American manufactures, had a law passed requiring that for an article to enjoy the full benefits of the British patent laws it must be manufactured in Great Britain. Mr. Chamberlain became ill and has never since taken part in public affairs.

The feeling against the United States diminished, but that against Germany did not. About that time the Germans began to be world travellers in large numbers. Lots of them drifted over to England on excursions and began to take in the sights. Some of the papers pictured these visitors as picking out the residences they would occupy when a German army had captured London. This was intended as a joke, but some persons took it seriously.

London had by this time a large German population, employed chiefly in connection with hotels and restaurants. The manager of one fashionable hotel in the West End was a Captain of reserves in the German army. The building of dirigibles in Germany led to years of fruitless experimenting by the British War Office with airships. Rumors were rife that England was filled with German spies, and many a luckless waiter in London and even in Glasgow was looked upon with suspicion because he spoke English with a strong accent. Then came the play "An Englishman's Home," which while it had a tremendous run and achieved popularity at home convinced some Englishmen and many others that a lot of fuss was being made out of nothing.

For many years the question of the unemployed has been a serious problem in England.

The number of men out of work in London alone usually runs into the hundreds of thousands, and at times it has been estimated at upward of a million. On Sundays they have been in the habit of gathering in Hyde Park, where the rule was to allow them or their leaders to say anything they pleased about anything. Socialist agitators found here a fruitful field. Then for years London has been known as the asylum of anarchists, nihilists and the worst crooks of the world.

The militant suffragette has been an extraordinary affliction to the present Government, and has added to the social and political problems that have had to be faced. She has developed a capacity for breaking the law which has vexed the soul of the Cabinet Minister, spoiled the good temper of the London bobby, and harassed the British jailer. The Prime Minister and other members of the Cabinet have been mobbed, the windows of their houses broken and riots have ended in the jailing of many of the militant women. Many women prisoners refused to eat, and had to be fed by force. A month of imprisonment seldom had a quieting effect on the suffragettes and the crusaders seemed to long for an acquaintance with the interior of Holloway and other jails.

Once a bill for equal suffrage actually got through a first reading in the House of Commons and was then sent to committee.

Parliament square has been the scene of many of the outbreaks, but the worst of all, and the one which awakened the Government to the necessity of strong measures, was that which took place on the night of March 1 when women armed with clubs, hammers and stones attacked the Government offices and the shops in Piccadilly and Regent and Oxford streets and smashed about $25,000 worth of window glass. More than 150 arrests were made, and some of the women were sentenced to imprisonment with hard labor.

The Government is now confronted by the possibility of one of the prisoners starving herself to death, which might cause a revulsion of public feeling, which is now against the suffragists. On the other hand, if the prisoners refuse to eat and forcible means are taken to make them, there might be damage suits resulting.

It has been said that King Edward once remarked that he feared that his was the last peaceful reign a monarch of England would enjoy. Certain it is that at the time of his death England was involved in a fierce political struggle over the budget and the question of limiting the veto power of the House of Lords. The crisis caused the King to hurry home from Biarritz, to meet his death from a chill caught in the wintry weather in London and at Sandringham, and it worried him during his last conscious hours. Since then the Lords have been limited as to their powers, and the Government has gone off more and more toward radical ideas.

No visitor at the coronation ceremonies last summer who had seen the jubilation in London over the crowning of King Edward could have failed to compare the densely lined streets of that former occasion with the thinly peopled thoroughfares that saw the progress of King George to the Abbey. There was a marked lack of enthusiasm. If you made enough inquiries you learned that the mass of people had no part in the gayeties that were in progress.

Something was in the air. You heard mutterings. If you questioned your prosperous acquaintances they would say: "It is nothing," and would point out that while the new King had not the popularity of his father, the country was all right, and the people all right, and business was good, and so on.

Hardly had the coronation visitors got away when something did happen. The trouble started almost simultaneously in London and Liverpool, with a strike of dock laborers. Then it rapidly spread to railway and car men, lighterers, coal porters, stevedores, tugboat engineers and firemen. Ben Tillett and Tom Mann, the leaders, soon estimated that 220,000 men had quit work.

Goods and foodstuffs were held up on the docks, and fruit and vegetables by the ton were allowed to rot because there was no one to move them. Ships loaded with provisions were held in the harbors, there being nobody to unload them. Ships could not be coaled at Liverpool, and numerous transatlantic crossings were cancelled. Rioting began early in Liverpool. Troops were ordered to London to lift the embargo on food and supplies. The clubs and hotels of the capital were without ice, and some of them short of food. Thousands who had no part in the strike were thrown out of work because their jobs were connected with the handling of goods. The strikes extended into Scotland.

Sir George Rankin Askwith, the comptroller-general of the commercial, labor and statistical department of the Board of Trade, took charge of the negotiations between the strikers and the employers and he was almost a week in conference with them before a basis of settlement was reached. Meantime, there was a battle between the police and the strikers in Liverpool, and then two days later, in the same city, a mob of 3,000 men attacked a prison van which was proceeding under a guard of hussars, the latter repelling the onslaught with their sabres.

On August 17, after two weeks of the strike, the Government decided that means of transportation should be kept open through the country and announced that it would take measures to insure this. That same day a general strike on all British railways was declared. Two days later as the result of secret negotiations the strike was declared off and the terms of adjustment left to local conciliation boards. At the time, in addition to the strikers, there were 20,000 steel workers idle in Barrow-in-Furness, 50,000 mill hands and colliers out of jobs in Lancashire and Yorkshire, 30,000 mill hands in South Wales whose factories were shut down and 10,000 colliers in Durham who could not work.

After the strike was pronounced over, it was a full week before the various industries that had been stopped were all going again. In this case, public opinion forced the settlement.

It was charged at the time that the measures adopted were only temporary, and that the same questions would soon have to be fought over. It was the question of a minimum wage that caused the strike last summer. It was the same question that was responsible for the beginning of the present strike

This time the coal industry was affected in the first instance, and it has been asserted that when the strike began, on March 1, just 1,049,407 miners walked out. The minimum wage demanded was $1.25 for a man and 50 cents a day for a boy. Sixty per cent. of the mine owners of Great Britain agreed to the proposition of a minimum wage, but the miners rejected the offer of the Government to fix this by arbitration. The other owners, who are principally in Scotland and South Wales, flatly refused to accept the principle, and charged the miners with violating previous agreements, and there has been a great deal of bitterness between them and their former employees.

Within a week, 750,000 men not employed in mining were thrown out of work, and the families affected directly by the strike numbered 4,000,000 people.

Industries kept closing down daily. Hundreds of families in the mining districts were reported in danger of starvation. There were riots in Lancashire. Conferences were held at intervals, but invariably broken off. Cities cut down their lighting; railroads curtailed their train service, and some took to converting their coal locomotives into oil burners. Orders were given to economize in the heating at Buckingham Palace, owing to the scarcity of coal. Large orders for coal were placed in this and other countries, but many ships were tied up in the ports, unable to get fuel.

The price of household supplies soared. Thousands of families were then on the verge of starvation. Steam trawlers were laid up at Grimsby, and the fish supply, which forms so large a part of England's daily diet, was almost cut off from the cities.

The Government had been fidgeting about, trying to conciliate, and then on March 19 a minimum wage bill was introduced in the House of Commons. It was fiercely opposed by the Conservatives. Pressure from financial and political circles was brought to bear upon the mine owners. The hope was entertained that the strike would be ended last Monday, but on that day nothing indicating a settlement was announced.

In some districts poverty began early in the week to cause the men to ask for their jobs again. In the meantime Premier Asquith refused to yield to the demand of the strikers that the minimum wage be actually fixed in the bill before Parliament.

Even should the present troubles be adjusted soon, there is prospect of more trouble to come, for the representatives of the strikers declare there will be a general strike of all labor unions in Great Britain in May. This, the leaders prophesy, will be the greatest industrial disturbance ever known.

Several important union questions are to come up for settlement during that month. They involve the interests of the shipwrights and boiler makers and the engineering, building and other trades, and that month has been selected as the most favorable time for a concerted movement. Upon the outcome of the present difficulty may depend whether that bigger industrial upheaval will take place. If it does, there are those who think that the third movement of this kind in England within a year would be impossible of suppression by peaceful measures, and who think that another heavy strain upon the resources of the country coming within so short a time might be fatal to the existing order of things.

Meantime there have been signs of discontent in some of England's possessions overseas, and particular attention has had to be paid to them. In India the spread of western education among the natives had awakened in them the desire to count for more in their own government, and there was talk of sedition here, and arrests were made there. That the act of King George in going to India to be crowned as Emperor at the durbar and the granting of certain concessions did much to stem the tide of discontent there can be no doubt. That it exists still was proved by the behavior of the Gaekwar of Baroda when he approached his feudal lord to render the customary obeisance.

As for Canada, there can be no question that reasons of state caused her to be singled out for special honor at the hands of royalty. Earl Grey made an excellent Governor-General, but there had been a growth of nationalist sentiment in the Dominion that boded no good for the tie that bound to the mother country. A court at Rideau Hall would give the Canadians real royalty in their capital and make them feel they were more truly an integral part of the British Empire. Presto, it was done, and the King's uncle came over as Governor-General.

Imperial conferences have played a big part in welding the empire together, so that the Australian or the New Zealander or the Canadian you run across in London is apt to be a more enthusiastic Britisher than the native variety. But this does not solve England's domestic problem, and in the opinion of many people the question, in spite of defeated American reciprocity, imperial preference, the All Red route and the durbar, still is, "Is England on the verge of a revolution?"

Perhaps nobody on this side of the Atlantic is better qualified to discuss the situation in England than Otto H. Kahn. As a business man and a partner in a big financial house, the nature of whose operations requires an understanding not only of the meaning of international issues but of economic and political movements in various countries, Mr. Kahn's powers of keen observation are known. Not only has he kept in close touch with English affairs for some years but it is only recently that he returned from a stay of several months in Great Britain, and his opinion has therefore the weight of knowledge acquired at first hand.

Mr. Kahn takes a view of the present coal strike and its attendant evils that is decidedly optimistic. While modestly declining to be put in the rôle of an expert on conditions such as have arisen in England, and speaking only as an observer, Mr. Kahn says he does not believe that England's future is in jeopardy. The country is going through a transition period. It is face to face with questions that all other nations will have to grapple with some day. England's present problems are merely antedating, as has so frequently been the case in social and economic movements and reforms, those of the rest of the world, and that country is tackling them, and in wrestling with them and finally solving them will make a precedent which, with more or less of modification, others may follow.

"I believe England will manage to settle her present difficulties as she has always managed to do in the past," said Mr. Kahn. "The country is simply ahead of the rest of the world in having now to face the labor question in an acute form. It has very frequently been so with England; from the time of the Magna Charta England has had to be in the forefront of economic and political reforms. The country had its revolution more than 150 years before France was called upon to go through its revolutionary crisis, and England had its Parliament and other tokens of freedom many years before other peoples were granted a representative legislative body.

"The social, economic and political problem which now confronts England exists, though as yet in less acute form, everywhere and will have to be faced some day by every other country. Its solution in England will probably establish a precedent for other nations to follow more or less closely. In other words, in my opinion, out of the present trouble will come finally, either by legislation or, as is so frequently the case in England, by tacit convention, some kind of settlement which will be lasting for some length of time and be a working model for other nations.

"The present situation, while very seriously disturbing for the time being, holds, in my opinion, no menace for the future of Great Britain, but it must be grappled with and solved. The present Government has truckled to the Labor vote and has permitted one of its leading members to indulge in inflammatory speeches. It has legalized so-called 'peaceful picketing'—a contradiction in terms. Before its advent if the unions did demonstrable, provable hurt to any one their funds could be attached by process of law. The removal of this power of attachment at the instance of the present Government has made the trade unions, so far as the law is concerned, free from all restraint. A contract entered into by a labor union ought to be as enforceable as any other contract and it ought to be held accountable for wrongful acts like any other association. In more ways than one the present Government has sown the wind and is reaping the whirlwind.

"But there is no question that all parties in England recognize that the labor situation has become a burning issue which has got to be dealt with, and in a fair and liberal and progressive spirit toward the workers. Through stress and strain and fight and much suffering progress is gradually being made, and the ultimate outcome, I believe, will be a situation which, while it will not mean the millennium, will be a great improvement compared with the ever renewed strife of the last ten years."

H. H. ASQUITH, PREMIER of ENGLAND...
PHOTO by UNDERWOOD & UNDERWOOD
THE MEN WHO NOW GUIDE ENGLAND

KING GEORGE V

OTTO HERMAN KAHN of NEW YORK, AN AUTHORITY ON the BRITISH SITUATION

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